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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Australian Defence Force

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Jones, Ewen, MP

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Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (11:45): I always like following the member for Bruce. Can I just say it is not the size of the spend; it is the quality of the spend and it is the actual spend. I like the member for Bruce—he is a good man—but they are big on announcement and small on delivery. In 2007 the then Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, came to Townsville and announced that there would be a stand-alone medical facility at Lavarack Barracks for the exclusive use of defence personnel and their families. The member for Brisbane is right when she talks about a lot of these things on health, but that thing has still not been delivered. It was never going to be delivered by Labor. The GP superclinic that was promised at the exact same time opened last week, so it took seven years. Labor is great on announcement, but let's get the thing through.

It is not the size of the spend; it is the quality of the spend. I acknowledge the member for Bruce, since we are talking about DFRDB, but let's get a bit of perspective here. I think both Labor and Liberal have a long history in this. It is a symbolic gesture more than anything, I always thought, for this group of people who were shafted by both sides of government for a long time, since the early 1970s. It has gone all the way through. We took it in 2010. I know Labor made a series of promises and the then Minister for Defence Materiel, Mike Kelly, said just before the election that he was going to fully fund it, and poor old Warren Snowdon, the member for Lingiari, was left hanging out there to dry all the way through.

But we are talking about a finite number of people. We are talking about a superannuation scheme, so it is going to get smaller and smaller as we go through. If we were not faced with the debt and deficit problems that we have and, going into the future, the problems we have with our structural spending, we would not have to make the announcements in relation to the changes to everyone's pensions. Everyone must help pay back our structural debt and make sure that we bring our budget spending back into order. That is the issue here and everyone must pay a price. I do not know anyone who has been able to pay back a loan without making a payment.

I am actually proud to say that my nephew has just received notification that he has been accepted into the Army. At the end of this year he finishes year 12 at Burdekin Catholic High School. He is looking to become a fitter and turner and he is going to do that through the Army. He wants to blow things up, so hopefully he will end up in cavalry or armoured.

I would like to spend my time talking about a couple of things here. Once again I think it is about the quality of the spend and where we spend the money. In Townsville we have RAAF Base Garbutt. It used to be home to the Caribou. The de Havilland Caribou was a great aircraft—quick take-off, quick landing, or short take-off, short landing. That aircraft has since been retired. The replacement, the C27J, has been earmarked to come to Australia by about 2018 or 2019. The then Prime Minister Howard said that the plane would come to Townsville. We understand that RAAF want it to go to Amberley.

My issue if it comes through to Amberley is that we have a situation where we have a superbase where defence will spend money building a facility on defence land and then charge defence rent. You just have this money churning, not benefiting anyone. If you brought it to Townsville you could have proper, private investment. Put the investment in Townsville and develop an aviation hub in northern Australia. It would be perfect for it. We have the land. We have the quality. RAAF Base Amberley is already a superbase. I think we need to look at those sorts of things as we go forward.

I would also like to put the government on notice that I think cadets, reservists and the string of people who are part of this motion are the way that we should employ people. I know that under the previous government we cut cadets' hours continually. So you will never have a budget blow-out in reserves; you just have fewer and fewer hours, fewer and fewer facilities and less and less commitment. What we must do is ensure that we have a way of transitioning people out of the Army and still keeping them in the service so that you do get the reserves and so that cadets are supported.

There should not be one person in this place who does not support our cadets and trying to get more people involved in this—because cadets are good people and I think there is a good way through this. So I would like to ensure that our government continues to support cadets, support reserves and support the many people who work in our defence forces. I congratulate the member for Brisbane on bringing this motion forward. I support it wholeheartedly.